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THE MEISTERSINGERS



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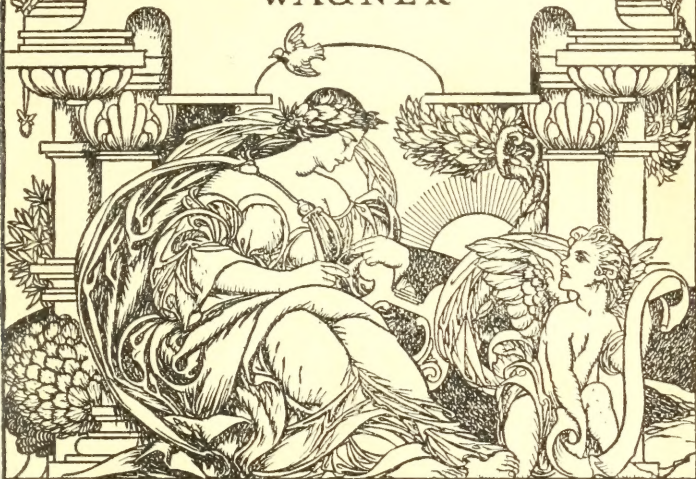




Walther and Eva at the Church at Nuremberg

THE GREAT OPERAS
BY
J. CUTHBERT HADDEN

THE
MEISTERSINGERS
WAGNER



LONDON. T.C.&E.C. JACK
NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES CO

GARTH
JONES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WALTHER VON STOLZING, Knight of Franconia (Bass)

EVA, Pogner's Daughter (Soprano)

MAGDALENA, her Nurse (Soprano)

DAVID, Hans Sachs' Apprentice (Tenor)

THE MASTERSINGERS :—

1. Hans Sachs, Shoemaker and Poet (Bass)

2. Pogner, a Goldsmith (Bass)

3. Beckmesser, the Town Clerk (Baritone)

4. Vogelgesang, a Furrier (Bass)

5. Nachtigal, a Tinsmith (Bass)

6. Kothner, a Baker (Bass)

7. Ortel, a Soapmaker (Bass)

8. Zorn, a Pewterer (Tenor)

9. Moses, a Tailor (Tenor)

10. Eisslinger, a Grocer (Tenor)

11. Folz, a Brazier (Bass)

12. Schwarz, a Weaver (Bass)

A Night Watchman (Bass)

Chorus of Apprentices (Altos and Tenors)

The Congregation in Church (Chorus of Sopranos
Altos, Tenors, and Bases)

Chorus of Neighbours, Old Citizens, Shoemakers,
Tailors, Bakers, and the General Populace

For an account of Wagner's life and a brief exposition of his theory of music-drama, the reader is referred to the volume on "Lohengrin" in this series.

THE REAL MEISTER- SINGERS

BEFORE proceeding to outline the story of Wagner's great humorous opera, it seems expedient to give the reader some account of the real "Mastersingers"—the artisan poets of Germany, who had a certain affinity with, and yet were entirely different from, the troubadours of France. It is not so long since the craft became extinct. Twelve old Meistersingers held regular meetings in a little inn at Ulm as late as 1830. By 1839 the number had dwindled to four; and the quartet solemnly decided that the society of Mastersingers be disbanded for ever.

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It is said that the last of these interesting survivals died in 1876.

The Meistersingers had their origin in the early part of the fourteenth century, and their golden age was about the time of the Lutheran Reformation. A versifying mania had taken possession of the lower classes. As one historian puts it, blacksmiths, weavers, shoemakers, doctors, and schoolmasters sought to mend their fortunes by making verses. Companies of these persons formed themselves into guilds or corporations, calling themselves "Mastersingers," and holding periodical gatherings at which they criticised each other's productions. They composed their verses in conformity with certain strict guild rules; accuracy, industry, and painstaking care, rather than an unfettered expression of the true spirit of poetry, were the main features of the Mastersingers' art. "Every

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fault was marked, and he who made the fewest was awarded the prize and permitted to take apprentices." When his apprenticeship was over the young man was admitted to the corporation as a full-fledged Meistersinger.

Expert writers who have studied the subject have shown that there was a guild of Meistersingers at Mainz as early as 1311. The idea caught the popular fancy, and before the fourteenth century was out, few towns in Germany were without their guild of Meistersingers. It was, however, at Nuremberg, and in the time of Hans Sachs (1494-1575), that the school attained its highest development. Nuremberg, which still preserves much of its ancient dignity, was in fact the heart and shrine of the mastersong. The circumstance is not forgotten to-day. Pilgrims find their way to the typical, mediæval town, visit St. Catherine's, where

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the formal contests of the Meistersingers were held; see the quaintly decorated cabinet that hangs on the church wall and bears the portraits of four "Meisters"; and indulge in dreams of the dead days as they pass through the streets once trod by Albert Dürer and Hans Sachs. Who does not know Longfellow's fine poem on Nuremberg?

Here Hans Sachs, the cobbler poet, laureate of
the gentle craft,
Wisest of the Twelve Wise Masters, in huge
folios sang and laughed.

.
Vanished is the ancient splendour, and before my
dreamy eye
Wave these mingled shapes and figures like a
faded tapestry.
Not thy Councils, not thy Kaisers, win for thee
the world's regard,
But thy painter Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Sachs,
thy cobbler-bard.

Sachs makes a considerable figure in Wagner's comedy, and it is therefore of

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interest to note that he was an historical character. No fewer than 6048 works are attributed to this cobbler-bard, 4275 of which are "Meisterlieder." Whatever he touched seems to have become either music or poetry under his hand! That Wagner idealised him is obvious enough, for no shoemaker could have been the philosopher, poet, artist, commoner, and genial Romanticist that Sachs is made to appear in this engaging drama. But our only concern here is to emphasise the fact that Sachs walked the earth in his day, and took a leading part in these competitions of the Meistersingers which Wagner has so humorously satirised.

So, too, with other Meistersingers in the opera—Pogner, Kothner, Zorn, Nachtigal, Beckmesser, and the rest—their names are all to be found in the treatise of Christoph Wagenseil, published in 1697. From this learned tome Wagner admit-

tedly gained his information about the old Meistersingers, their contests, and their quaint manners. But he worked up the story in his own way to suit his own particular purpose. The charming love episode, for example, is entirely his conception, for no real-life candidate for admission to the Meistersingers' guild ever won his bride as a prize in the song contest. This is another tribute to the dramatic genius of the master whose delightful comedy we now proceed to describe.

FIRST ACT

The period is the middle of the sixteenth century. When the curtain rises, we see the interior of St. Catherine's Church at Nuremberg. The choir is in front, and the scene is so arranged that the last rows of seats in the nave are

visible at the back of the stage. The precise time is the afternoon of the eve of St. John's feast (Midsummer Day), and the assembled congregation are singing the last verse of a hymn to the Baptist. During the singing a quiet flirtation is going on between Eva Pogner, the daughter of Veit Pogner (a rich goldsmith, one of the most substantial members of the Meistersingers' guild), and Walther Von Stolzing, a young knight from Franconia. We see Walther leaning against a pillar, evidently paying little heed to the service. He has fallen in love at first sight, and the charming Eva is by no means indisposed to his advances.

When the congregation has dispersed, Walther approaches Eva, enters into conversation with her, and asks if she is married. Her maid, Magdalena, explains that she is to be married on the morrow,

though she does not yet know who is to be the bridegroom. It must be understood here that one of the usual singing contests has been arranged. Walther has already made the acquaintance of Eva's father; but Pagner, concerned about the dignity of the Mastersingers' craft, has declared that his daughter shall marry the successful candidate in the coming vocal competition.

Walther decides that he will enter the lists, if necessary. Meantime he will approach the maiden herself directly, if clandestinely. Eva shows herself not unwilling to listen. With womanly ingenuousness she feigns to have left her scarf behind, and Magdalena (for "two's company but three's none") sets off to find it. She returns before the lovers have had their talk out, and is despatched once more, this time in search of a brooch. The brooch is secured, but still

the lovers are whispering in each other's ears. Magdalena accordingly goes away the third time—now for a hymn-book. Then, when she has finally returned Walther openly avows his passion for Eva. Magdalena is somewhat shocked that a love affair should be conducted in church in this unblushing manner; and she interposes to say that until the singing competition has been held it will be impossible to tell who is to be Eva's husband.

At this stage David, an apprentice to Hans Sachs, the shoemaker and poet, arrives with other apprentices of the Mastersingers to prepare seats for the forthcoming examination in song. David, let it be remarked, is Magdalena's lover. Walther realises that, if he is to have the slightest chance of gaining Eva's hand, he must enter the contest. He announces this intention, and Magdalena

refers him to David, who, she says, in effect, will coach him up for his examination by the Mastersingers. After the two women have left the church David begins his instructions, rattling off a ludicrous description of the various technicalities required to produce a correct "master-song." The candidate, it seems, must become a singer and recognise at sight all the different tones—the "short," the "long," the "fragrant hawthorn," the "frog," the "cinnamon stalk," the "faithful pelican," and so on. Next, he must show himself a poet and write words to the air. Finally he is required to produce something in which both words and music are his own, and in which only seven breaches of recognised rule are allowed.

Before the "coaching" business is finished, the booth usually erected for the "marker" in the contest has been

set up, and the Mastersingers now enter. First come Pogner (Eva's father) and Beckmesser, a pompous elderly widower, who presumes to aspire to the hand of Eva. Beckmesser, being the eldest of the Masters, has been appointed marker for the occasion; his duty being to sit in a curtained box and note every infraction of established rule which may occur in the candidate's song.

The Masters being all assembled, Pogner tells of his intention to bestow his daughter on the victorious candidate in the ensuing contest. Beckmesser is naturally anxious, and when Walther is presently brought forward as a candidate, the marker eyes him with uneasy suspicion. Pogner, it should be said, has left his daughter the option of refusing the hand of the successful contestant, but he insists that she must marry inside the Mastersingers' guild. This plan of his

gives rise to discussion—some approving it; others, Beckmesser among them, disapproving. Hans Sachs, now one of the assembly, quizzes Beckmesser on the point, remarking that *they* at least are too old to be seriously considered as aspirants for Eva's hand. There is much noise and commotion over this discussion, especially on the part of the apprentices.

But now Walther is about to be heard. He intimates love and nature as his theme, and proceeds to sing his song. Being self-taught and quite "unfamiliar with the traditional rigid rules, he proves himself entirely incorrect according to the laws of the guild. Beckmesser, who has been very busy over his slate, declares that he never heard such a disgraceful exhibition; that there are positively more mistakes than he can keep note of. The genial, sympathetic Sachs wishes to hear Walther out to the

end, insisting that, though not according to rule, his song is truly poetical; but the youth is declared to have "mis-sung and failed," and the meeting dissolves in confusion. Walther vainly endeavours to make himself heard: Sachs intercedes for him, the other Masters protesting; Beckmesser scolds and points out more faults; and Pogner shows himself deeply distressed lest his daughter's already engaged affections make it impossible for him to carry out his novel scheme. Such is the situation when the curtain falls.

SECOND ACT

The Second Act passes in one of Nuremberg's quaintly picturesque streets, with Pogner's house on one side and Sachs' on the other. It is now the eve of St. John's festival, and the summer night is drawing on. The apprentices are putting

up the shutters, singing, and chaffing each other (particularly David) the while. Pogner and Eva enter, returning from a walk ; and in the conversation that follows Pogner discovers the state of his daughter's affections. From Magdalena, her attendant (Pogner having now gone into the house), Eva learns of her lover's failure. She determines to ask Sachs for advice.

Presently the shoemaker seats himself at his work in the door of his shop. "The balmy air of the evening, the scent of the elder tree, turn his thoughts to the poetry which he heard at the trial. What though it outraged the rules of the Masters, and even puzzled him? Within it lay real power. The singer (Walther) sang not to meet rules, but because utterance was demanded by his feelings. Let the Masters rage ; Hans Sachs is well pleased." Such is the substance of the famous monologue in this act.

Eva emerges from her father's house, and, in a delightful scene with Sachs, suggests that, to escape marriage with the vain old Beckmesser, she would gladly marry Sachs himself.¹ The shoemaker (though he loves Eva) discourages the idea and leaves her after learning, what he has suspected, that she is really in love with Walther. Next moment Eva is in the arms of the Franconian knight. Walther, full of resentment against the Masters, proposes an immediate elopement. Eva consents, vowing she will have no one but him. Sachs, however, from his shop-door, has overheard much of the conversation. He has other plans for compassing the happiness of the pair, and he resolves to thwart their present

¹ It is well known that the real Sachs, when past middle age, was attracted by a very young girl, whom he married, and that he lived happily with her till he died.

scheme. Consequently, as they are about to depart, he throws the strong light of his lantern on them where they are standing. They slink into the shadow, and just as they are proceeding to retire down another street, Beckmesser, lute in hand, approaches for the purpose of serenading Eva. As the old "marker" begins to tune his instrument, Sachs brings his bench into the doorway and starts work, singing lustily, and pounding vigorously at his last.

In answer to Beckmesser's inquiry about this prodigious noise, Sachs replies that he is trying to finish the shoes which Beckmesser himself had demanded of him that very day. Here Magdalena, personating Eva, shows herself at the window, and Beckmesser endeavours to sing his song to her. He is very effectually prevented by the racket still kept up by the shoemaker. This leads to an

agreement between the pair: Sachs will act as "marker" while Beckmesser sings, the shoemaker correcting each error by a stroke of his hammer.

A most comical scene ensues. Sachs had remarked that Beckmesser's shoes would be finished before Beckmesser's song. And so it turns out. The shoemaker's blows come fast and furious; Beckmesser, in his rage, sings louder and louder. At last the neighbours, roused by the din, come out to put a stop to it. A general *mêlée* follows; and David, realising that Beckmesser has been serenading his sweetheart, Magdalena, attacks the old fellow with a cudgel. In the midst of the uproar Sachs comes out of his shop, seizes Walther by the arm (he had resolved to escape with Eva during the confusion), takes him into his own house, and sends Eva across the way to her father. The night-watchman's horn

is heard in the distance, the crowd disperses, the beaten Beckmesser limps away, and the curtain falls on the quiet moonlight street.

THIRD ACT

The Third Act opens in the interior of Sachs' shop. The shoemaker is seen in reverie, with a volume resting on his knees. It is the morning of the eventful day. David, his apprentice, fails to rouse Sachs out of his brooding humour, though there is a diverting scene between the pair, in which David, being asked to sing the festival lesson, forgets himself so far as to begin the verses to St. John to the tune of Beckmesser's serenade. When Sachs is left alone, he breaks into the second great monologue of the opera, "Wahn, Wahn; überall Wahn" (Madness, madness; everywhere madness), a



The Night Watchman



fine expressive piece, the entire text of which must be read in order to be understood. At its conclusion Walther enters, descending from the room in which he has passed the night. He informs Sachs of "a wondrous, lovely dream" he has had, in which an idea for a song has been communicated to him. Sachs bids him put it into verse and make a "master-song" of it. Walther, hesitating at first, obeys. He begins, in fact, the song by which he is subsequently hailed the victor in the contest. Sachs stops him at various points with hints and reproving instructions.

Finally the shoemaker's entire approval is gained; he puts the song on paper, and the two leave the room together to prepare for the festival. Beckmesser now comes limping by, and, seeing the room empty, enters. His eye catches the paper which Sachs has left on the table. He

concludes that the shoemaker is the author of the newly-written song—that by it he means to compete for the hand of Eva. Hearing footsteps approaching, Beckmesser hastily pockets the manuscript, and, on Sachs entering, accuses him of rivalry and treachery. To Beckmesser's surprise, Sachs tells him that he may have the song, adding that under no circumstances will he claim it as his own.

The old pedant, knowing Sachs' fame as a poet, is overjoyed, thinking himself now assured of success. The events of the previous night, he says, had driven his own song quite out of his head. Might he use this one? "Certainly," replies the shoemaker, "but be careful how you study it, for it is not easy." "And you will promise me never to say that it is yours?" "Willingly!" And so exit Beckmesser, for the time being a happy man.

Eva, in her betrothal dress, now arrives, protesting that something is amiss with one of her shoes. Sachs, smiling incredulously, pretends to put it right. Walther, richly clad, comes next, standing spell-bound at the sight of Eva. Sachs suggests that a third stanza might now be added to the prize song. This is done, and Walther sings it. Eva, "deeply moved, throws herself into Sachs' arms, saying that she has reached a new understanding of him and herself. David and Magdalena enter, and Sachs announces that a mastersong has been made. He promotes David from apprentice to journeyman, that he may hear the song, which an apprentice could not honour, and then he invites Eva to speak."

The company now start for the field of contest, and the scene changes to a meadow by the river-side. Various guilds with their banners arrive; last of all the

Mastersingers. Pogner and his daughter appear together, and are assigned the place of honour on the platform. The beloved Sachs, after being greeted by one of his own songs, addresses the assembly, intimating the terms of the competition. Beckmesser, as the senior candidate, is the first to be called. He has been trying in vain to master the appropriated song, and he is in the last depths of despair, trembling in every limb. He is perfectly certain no one will understand his song, but he relies on Sachs' popularity.

Alas! whether Sachs' writing was indistinct, or his own brain was muddled—probably both—Beckmesser makes such arrant nonsense of the words that at last the listeners burst into a united roar of laughter. Beckmesser, in a fury, turns on Sachs, declaring that, since the song is his, *he* is the author of the fiasco. Sachs, of course, promptly denies the



Eva at Sach's the Shoemaker's

paternity of the song, adding that Beckmesser best knows how he came by it. It is a very good song when properly sung, says the shoemaker, in effect. And then, looking round the assembly, he picks out Walther and asks him to give the correct rendering.

The young knight comes forward and sings his song. By popular acclamation he is awarded the prize, and with it Eva's hand. Walther, satisfied with having gained his bride, is for declining the added glory of being invested with the insignia of the Meistersingers' guild. Sachs, however, points out to him that it would be rude to refuse the honour. The victor yields, whereupon Eva snatches the laurel from her lover and places it on Sachs' brow; and the curtain descends as the people joyfully acclaim the worthy shoemaker, who is in reality the central figure in the drama.

THE HISTORY

WAGNER sketched out "The Meistersingers" at Marienbad in 1844, soon after he had finished "Tannhäuser." The latter was a serious opera; "The Meistersingers" was to be a comic pendant to it. The notion of Wagner writing a homely comic opera seems almost as incongruous as the notion of the author of "Don Quixote" writing a Bible Commentary. It is the very last thing we should suspect Wagner of doing. Yet he did it, and did it purposely, too. He wanted to show, as he has expressly avowed, that however visionary his ideas of the music-drama might be, he could nevertheless



Eva bestows the Laurel Wreath

turn his hand successfully to the composition of a work founded on the simplest materials; a work which anybody could understand; a work at which even the commercially-minded manager need not shy. In a word, Wagner meant "The Meistersingers" to be an essentially popular opera, and he realised his intention.

But what a process of evolution it passed through! Sketched out, as we have said, in 1844, it was not completed until 1867, twenty-three years after the subject had taken shape in the composer's mind. The poem itself was finished in Paris in 1862. The music, too, was begun in that year; but Wagner had shortly afterwards to fly from his creditors, and it was not until he had secured the protection and practical help of Ludwig, the "mad king" of Bavaria, that he was able to bring the opera to a hearing.

Eighteen years of enforced exile had been patiently endured while "The Meistersingers" was maturing—years of bitter struggle with Fate and finances; years when the very necessities of life were often wanting, and Hope, the medicine of the miserable, showed hardly one of those "pleasures" of which the neglected poet has sung. "I am in a miserable condition, and can with difficulty persuade myself that I can go on like this. Would it not be better to put an end to this disgraceful kind of life?" Thus the composer, deep in despair, wrote to his friend Liszt.

And while he thus wrote the charming music of this, one of the very best comic operas of modern times was filling his mind! He had almost decided to throw up his profession and seek his bread in India as a tutor; yet, in the midst of all

that despondency, all that distress connected with the sordid affairs of the material life, he manages to perfect this great opera of "The Meistersingers," as great in its own particular vein as the "Ring" itself! Truly has one said, "never was the might of Wagner's genius more apparent."

Ludwig, the mad king, "took up" Wagner just when he was at his wits' end. This was in 1864, two years after he had finished the poem of "The Meistersingers." Ludwig, he said, writing to a friend, "wants me to be always with him, to work, to rest, and to produce my works. He will give me all I need. I am to finish the Ring, and everything shall be as I wish." Ludwig, in fact, provided him with a villa and a substantial "allowance"; and, under these happily settled conditions, the score of "The

Meistersingers " was proceeded with. But it was not all plain sailing. Even kings (mad kings) have their troubles. Ludwig was charged (such is the actual truth) with endangering the interests of the State by his advocacy and protection of this revolutionary composer. On the other hand, Wagner himself was popularly supposed to be encouraging Ludwig in his wild extravagances—a delusion which seemed to gain support from Ludwig's project of building a special theatre for the production of Wagner's works. Bayreuth, as we all know, was the practical result of that idea.

Meanwhile, Wagner found things becoming so uncomfortable for him at Munich that he left for Switzerland in 1865, and once more became a wanderer. The "Ring" appears to have been the chief cause of the trouble. Here is an

interesting quotation from Wagner himself—

Now that I and my project had been placed in broad daylight, all the ill-will that had hitherto lain in ambush made an open attack in full force. I even tried to divert public attention from the whole affair by spending a hard-won and much-needed rest on the completion of "Die Meistersinger," a work with which I should not appear to be quitting the customary groove of performances at the theatre.

Thus "The Meistersingers" was now awaiting the favourable time when the absurd, ill-founded feeling against its composer should have died down. That time came in 1868. Wagner then returned to Munich to superintend the rehearsals of the work, and the first performance took place at the Royal Court Theatre on the 21st of June. It was a great success—peculiar indeed, among Wagnerian music-dramas, in being a success from the start. Von Bülow conducted (he whose

divorced wife was presently to become Frau Wagner), and that same Dr. Hans Richter who is still happily with us was the chorus-master. It is well known that the first complete score of "The Meistersingers" was copied out by Richter, who stayed with Wagner for the purpose. Next year (1869) the opera was heard at Weimar and Dresden. Berlin staged it in 1870, and after that fresh towns were continually added to the list. The first London performance took place in May 1882, when Richter was conducting a season of German Opera. Strangely enough, it was not given at Bayreuth until 1888.

There is so much to be said about every individual music-drama of Wagner's, and one feels the imbecility of trying to say everything under a section heading! One certainly wants to note how Wagner,

in "The Meistersingers," is supposed to have reproduced himself in the character of Walther. He has not, in set words, given us any ground for such an idea. All the same we may readily agree with an acute American critic that the composer really designed Walther to represent, like himself, the spirit of progress in music; while, in the Mastersingers, he embodied the spirit of pure pedantry.

"These two powers," says the American critic, "have always been at war in the world of art, and always will. Theoreticians and critics publish rules which they deduce from the practice of the great artists. The next original genius who arrives has something new to say, and says it in a new way. . . . Wagner, in 'The Meistersingers,' has shown us the spirit of progress in its jubilant youth, scoffing at the established rule of which

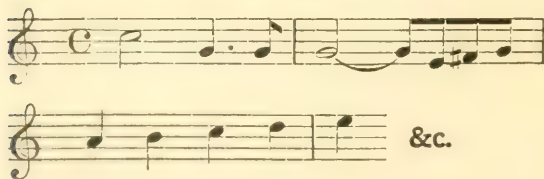
it is ignorant. One of the first lessons of the symbolism of the comedy is that a musician, or any other artist, must master what has already been learnt of his art before he can advance beyond it." But who wants to think of symbolism in listening to a comic opera? Critics and commentators may debate themselves blind as to whether Hamlet was mad or only feigning madness. What cares the spectator? The play's the thing—or the opera !

THE MUSIC

OUR notice of the music of "The Meistersingers" must necessarily be somewhat brief; for there are so many points of almost equal importance that, if we once entered on a detailed analysis, we should be in danger of exhausting the resources of the composers' "case." True to his theories, Wagner gives us here no separate songs or detached movements; but one piece leads into another from beginning to end of an act. Wagner, remember, objects to the detached aria as unnatural. One might answer his objection by saying that opera itself is also, from a matter-of-fact point of view,

unnatural, or at least artificial. But into such a discussion one must not, and need not, enter here.

As in most of Wagner's great music-dramas, we have in the overture to "The Meistersingers" a sort of musical epitome of the entire work. This masterly piece of orchestration tells of the guild, with its cast-iron rules; of Walther's attempts to gain admission to its conservative circle; and of the ultimate victory of Art over all inartistic barriers. At the opening of the overture a stately melody is given out, known as the Meistersingers' *Motiv*, and representing the guild with all its mannerisms and formalities:



A few measures farther on, the sonorous grandeur of the Meistersingers' March arrests the attention :



The breadth and wealth of sound which go to make up this part are truly superb: bar follows bar with an ever-increasing richness of melody and orchestration which has rarely been surpassed even by Wagner himself. The second theme is of peculiar interest, because Wagner evolved it from the opening notes of a genuine Meistersinger tune :



This was Hemrich Müglin's melody, known among the Mastersingers as the "Long Tone." The listener should

understand that Wagner made use of real Meistersinger tunes in his drama, his object being to typify the art represented by the Masters. On the other hand, he employed themes of his own to express the uprising of emotion, as opposed to pedantic rule, in the breast of the young knight Walther. Thus we have the prize love-song of Eva's admirer, thrown into the bright key of E major immediately after a transposition from C :



Out of this and similar thematic material the overture is built. An ever-increasing undercurrent of excitement leads up to the climax, when the Meistersingers' *Motiv* bursts forth again in all its glory. The character of the whole prelude is, in short, the character of the drama

itself—"a contest of forces with a final reconciliation."

The First Act opens with quite an old-fashioned chorale, sung by choir and congregation. When Eva and Walther are left by themselves for their stolen interview, the "Spring" theme, which plays so important a part in the score, is heard :

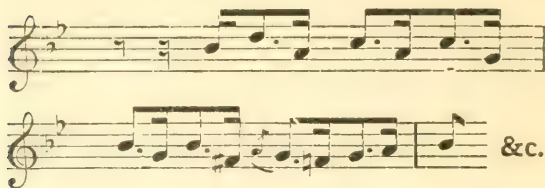


The character of the music changes when David, Sachs' assistant, enters; the idea being to represent in lively strains the gay, young, irresponsible life of the Meistersinger apprentices. This is clear from the fact that, with the entrance

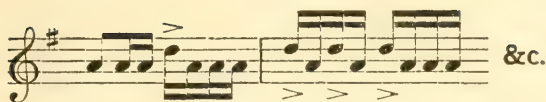
comfiture and ill-temper over Walther's candidature are admirably expressed by certain dissonances in the orchestra; while few can fail to remark the "kindly theme" introduced as Sachs speaks. The act, as we have seen, ends in general confusion, and the closing bars of the score are notable for the humorous way in which the bassoons, the clowns of the orchestra, satirise the "ponderous dignity" of the Meister-singers' *Motiv*.

The music of the Second Act is "simplicity itself" up to the appearance of Pogner and Eva. The score is "rich with themes already made known," but when the goldsmith tells his daughter of the plan he has conceived for the disposal of her hand, we hear for the first time, what may be called the Nuremberg *Motiv*, which is to be regarded as expressing

the pride of the citizens in their quaint old town :



Familiar themes, "employed to make a mood-picture of great beauty," illustrate the scene between Sachs and Eva. When Walther enters, the knight theme is repeated; and a tender love *Motiv* appeals to the ear as Eva declares her eternal faith in him. Some lovely music accompanies the approach of the night watchman; and the development of the uproar in the street is "worked out with immense contrapuntal skill." Note, in particular, how the composer represents the beating of Beckmesser :



When the street is finally cleared of the crowd, the music of the summer night "steals back in an ethereal whisper," and the act ends with "one of those beautiful points of repose which Wagner knew so well how to make after a movement of extreme agitation."

The prelude to the Third Act has been described as marking the highest point of the drama. Here in a creation of marvellous beauty and expressiveness, the composer paints for us the soul of the poet-cobbler, moved to its deepest being. The wonderfully stirring "*Wahn*" *Motiv* is associated with the great monologue of the act in which Sachs broods over the eagerness of poor mortals to engage in

strife. The scene between Walther and the shoemaker is full of luscious melody. And then, who can miss the "mastersong" which finally wins for Walther the prize?



The scene following Eva's entrance in her betrothal dress is full of delicate characterisation. There is a beautiful passage for the recitation of Sachs; and the quintet which follows, written in the familiar operatic manner—that is, in purely lyric style—is generally allowed to be "one of the loveliest conceptions of this extraordinary work." In the last scene the leading themes of the opera are woven into a marvellous web, twining

and winding themselves round Sachs' address, as if all mankind were thronging to his side.

What shall we say further? A hearing of "The Meistersingers" emphasises several points. We remark chiefly the lyric quality of the work—the charming songs scattered throughout, most of them detachable from the context. We note also the important part which the chorus plays as compared with other works of the master. Again, we see the mastery with which Wagner has "caught and reproduced the atmosphere of sixteenth century Nuremberg without sacrificing a jot of the absolute modernity of his style." The complexity and elaboration of the score are further points of interest. Finally there is the orchestration. Wagner used to be called one of the noisiest of modern composers. One outstanding

feature of "The Meistersingers" is, however, the moderation and discretion of its accompaniments. The instrumentation is always rich, often sonorous, very seldom noisy. For example, in the first two pages of the First Act the full orchestra is only used twice—each time for a few bars; and similar reticence is the characteristic of the whole work. The ingenuity and novelty of the treatment of the wind instruments are above all praise.

THE END

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